

# Rescuing Art from Visual Culture Studies

MICHELLE MARDER KAMHI

This article originated as a talk entitled "Rescuing Art from 'Visual Culture,'" presented at the annual meeting of the National Art Education Association in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in April 2003. It was published online in a slightly different version in the January 2004 issue of *Aristos* (<http://www.aristos.org/aris04/rescuing.htm>), which includes links to images of most of the works discussed. Reprinted by permission. ©The Aristos Foundation, 2004.

Current efforts to transform art education into visual culture studies (VCS) constitute a deeply disturbing educational trend. Much like the now largely discredited developments in literary studies of recent decades (whose bankruptcy it apparently ignores), this movement aims quite explicitly at a radical transformation of American society and is, therefore, primarily social and political in its intent.<sup>1</sup> Its influence is not only likely to dull the next generation's aesthetic sensibilities and thereby coarsen the general level of culture but may also extend far beyond the arts themselves. I have previously argued that in both their aims and their methods, such studies have no place in art education, the proper focus of which is the visual arts.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, much more needs to be said about the problematic aspects of this trend.

From the standpoint of art education, the overriding objection to this movement is its blatant disregard of essential differences between works of visual art and other types of cultural artifacts.<sup>3</sup> By *visual art*, I mean what is broadly termed painting and sculpture (traditionally termed *fine art*): that is, two- and three-dimensional re-creations of reality whose purpose is to concretize ideas and values in an emotionally compelling form. In contrast to the decorative arts, the crafts, or the various fields of design, such works have no physical function but instead serve a purely psychological or spiritual need.<sup>4</sup> This and other fundamental differences are ignored by the proponents of VCS.

## A Dubious Approach to Interpretation

The disregard of important distinctions in VCS is especially evident in how the field treats images. Works of art convey meaning largely through the depictive and expressive qualities of their imagery. Rather than seeking meaning in such features, however, VCS emphasizes "decoding" or "deconstructing" images in terms of information and associations that are symbolic or verbal, not pictorial. Moreover, the overwhelming focus is on artifacts other than works of fine art. In a recent article in the journal *Art Education*, for exam-

ple, Terry Barrett—an influential professor of art education at Ohio State University—aims to show (in his words) "how teachers, college students, middle-school students, and preschoolers have deconstructed a painting by [Michael Ray] Charles, a cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine, printed t-shirts, cereal boxes, and teddy bears."<sup>5</sup> The *Rolling Stone* cover featured the words "Booty Camp" and a photograph of three provocatively posed and scantily clad young women.

The only work of purported art among the items considered by Barrett is the "painting" by Charles. Titled *Cut and Paste*, it is a work so schematic in its rendering that it is not a painting in the full sense at all, but merely a diagrammatic line drawing in black and white acrylic, simulating a child's paper cutouts—a crude cartoon, in effect. Its significance is deliberately and wholly dependent on what one writer, quoted by Barrett, has referred to as "the ossified stereotypes still rumbling around the American subconscious." Conspicuously absent are the subtleties of observation, draftsmanship, and expression that principally contribute to the distinctive value of works of fine art. Any schematic representation of the many objects depicted by Charles (from the running figure of an African-featured man wearing boxing shorts and gloves

to the knife, banana, and other artifacts that are displayed around him) would do as well to convey the idea intended. Once one gets the point, there is no need or desire to dwell further on the image itself. It has nothing more to say.<sup>6</sup>

### Decoding through Social and Political Abstractions

Furthermore, the decoding undertaken in VCS emphasizes abstract social and political issues at the expense of more concrete personal experience. Lamenting that “the [personal] consequences of racial stereotyping are dreadful,” Barrett claims that “the teachers [who] interpreted *Cut and Paste* . . . were in a position to intellectually and emotionally identify with the tragic meaning of the artwork.”<sup>7</sup> The work itself, however, fails to convey anything of the personal or emotional dimension of racial bias—whether of the anguished feelings of exclusion and debasement that it often engenders, or of the dignity that may be maintained despite it, or of the impassioned sense of outrage and rebellion that it can inspire. The viewer must imagine such things for himself, lacking the stimulus that sensitive concretization in a work of art might afford.

By focusing on abstract questions of race, class, gender, and ethnicity, moreover, the visual culture approach to interpretation lays stress on politicized issues that divide society, rather than on shared human values and concerns. As the National Standards for Arts Education emphasize, the arts “have served to connect our imaginations with the deepest questions of human existence.”<sup>8</sup> Such questions are far more universal than the current preoccupation with matters of racism, gender bias, or social status would suggest. Tending to view the world in terms of competing interest groups, the proponents of VCS wrongly assume that all individuals within a given group necessarily share the same set of values and concerns and that these distinguish them from other groups. This aspect of the movement is particularly insidious, for it belies both the principle of individualism that lies at the heart of American society and the fundamental

conviction that, despite our great diversity, we share certain core values.

### Distortion of Focus

Although the values embodied in art often transcend politics, economics, and social status, viewers who follow the promptings of VCS to ferret out the purported subtexts contained in every image are, in effect, primed to ignore the artist’s actual focus and the entirely legitimate values that it may imply. I am reminded of the wall text in a Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition of nineteenth-century art a few years ago. Referring to a painting of a small child grasping the sturdy hand of a nursemaid (who, as I recall, was pictured only from the neck down), the text expounded upon the marginalization of nannies in the culture of the period. The unwary viewer was thereby encouraged to view the painting in a rather negative light. As a result, one might have overlooked that the nursemaid’s firm grasp—which was a focal point of the picture—betokened trust and security, implying that the child, the main focus of the painting, was well cared for, as befits a cherished offspring. Speculations about the marginalization of servants, which might have been appropriate in a sociology class, had very little, if any, relevance for this painting as a work of art.

Finally, since the attitude of suspicion fostered by the decoding approach in VCS impedes a sympathetic engagement with works of art, it is likely to deprive children of the deep emotional enrichment that painting and sculpture can afford. The main emotions inspired by this approach are all on the side of anger, resentment, and moral outrage, leaving little place for a host of other feelings, from reverence, tenderness, and love to pride, courage, grief, and compassion. In contrast to the negative emphasis of such studies, the national educational standards refer to the “joy of experiencing the arts”<sup>9</sup>—although “joy” is not the best word here; it is too narrow. What is involved in the authentic experience of art is a deepened sense of life and oneself, a mental and emotional grounding that can include joy

but is hardly restricted to it. It emerges from the profound psychological need to see our ideas and feelings about the world projected into sensory form, and it contributes in important ways to the well-being of the individual, as neurologist Oliver Sacks has eloquently testified in accounts of the diverse patients whom he has observed.<sup>10</sup> Such an experience can only be stifled by the detached, analytical approach adopted in VCS.

### What Characteristics Distinguish Works of Visual Art?

In their rush to embrace VCS, art teachers immersed in postmodern culture—and in the postmodernist work that now passes for art—have lost sight of the salient qualities of works of visual art. As a result, their interpretations are prone to error, blurring major differences not only between painting, sculpture, and other types of imagery but also between works of visual art and artifacts that are not images at all.<sup>11</sup>

In what follows, I consider how art works differ from two other major categories of imagery often emphasized in VCS, commercial art (advertising) and photography.<sup>12</sup> Needless to say, artifacts that are not images are even more dissimilar.

*The nature of the image.* In works of art, the manner of representation is of prime importance, contributing significantly to the ultimate import of what is depicted. Imagery in art is highly selective, tending toward subtlety of detail, nuance of expression, and intensity of focus. It invites close, lingering attention on the part of the viewer. Postmodernism in the visual arts deliberately flouts such qualities, however (as the example of *Cut and Paste*, cited above, illustrates). It instead relies heavily on ordinary found objects, mechanical techniques of image-making, stereotypes, and appropriated images rendered stale by repetition. For these and related reasons, Louis Torres and I have argued that postmodernist genres such as pop art, installation art, and video art have nothing essential in common with the traditional visual arts and should, therefore, not be classified or studied with them as art.<sup>13</sup>

Like the spurious art of postmodernism, advertising images tend to employ visual stereotypes or exaggerations and rely heavily on accompanying verbal captions or text to convey their intended meaning. Under normal circumstances, they rarely elicit protracted attention. Photographic images differ in yet other ways, which I will detail.

*The creative process.* As one might expect, such differences in visual characteristics derive from fundamental disparities in the creative process. A work of art is the product of an artist's personal engagement with the subject matter at hand, and the process of making it is painstakingly selective, searching, and relatively fluid. By the term *fluid*, I mean that although the artist starts with an idea of some kind, its embodiment is achieved gradually over time, and the idea may be clarified as the work takes shape. Historical evidence of this process lies in the *pentimenti* (forms subsequently painted over) that are at times revealed even in the works of the great masters, indicating a change of mind in the process of composition. Furthermore, the focus of a work of art is long term and metaphysical. It reflects what the artist regards as important in human life or in his conception of the divine or supernatural realm. In some measure, every artist is engaged, albeit most often subconsciously, with such questions as, What aspects of human experience do I regard as important? What is worth remembering? What do I value—or abhor? Finally, during the creative process, an artist is concerned first and foremost with getting the work right by his own judgment. Although he may refer to such things as aiming to please God or the gods, the work is nonetheless governed by his own conception of what will best achieve that end. At every stage of the work, the implicit question is, Does this say what I think it should?

In contrast, a commercial artist typically focuses on the client's needs. Because the primary purpose of commercial art is the selling of a product or an idea to a third party, the artist's main concern is with how others will view the image. The artist is therefore more

detached and less emotionally engaged. He aims to get the job done to satisfy others. The point of the image is immediate, short term, particular—for example, buy this car or say no to drugs. In this connection, some are inclined to ask, What about religious art—isn't it like advertising? Does it not aim to sell something? Such questions miss an important distinction, however. Unlike commercial art, religious art deals with profound metaphysical values, which

level, if only subliminally, the viewer is likely to be aware of the differences that I have outlined regarding creative process and intent. In the case of art, one knows that a painting or drawing, even when done directly from life, is filtered through the imagination and sensibility of the artist. One senses, therefore, that the image is meant to imply something about human values—a view of the world—beyond the particulars that are represented. In contrast, because one is

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engage the artist in a way that creating an advertisement for Coca-Cola or Cheerios would not.

Photographic images differ from both fine and commercial art (in which every detail is determined by choice) in being largely dependent on the impersonal spontaneous process by which light creates an image on a photo-sensitive surface. (This is initially true of digitized images as well, although the original image can then be infinitely manipulated. For the sake of clarity, I limit my remarks here to traditional photographic techniques.) The term photography itself means “drawing by light,” implying that the image is made by the action of light, not by an artist. Although the photographer exercises some selectivity and control, the image is ultimately formed by an automatic photochemical process that is not under volitional control in every detail. Finally, unlike a work of fine art, even of commercial art, photographs are an actual record of some aspect of reality mediated mainly by an automatic inanimate process, albeit one initiated by a human being. They are a selective record of reality, not a selective re-creation of it.

*The viewer's perspective.* On some

aware that an advertisement is aimed at selling a specific product or a relatively transitory idea, one dismisses notions of any deeper significance.

The viewer's perspective also tends to differ with regard to photographs. One is always aware that a photograph is a document of real particulars, made in large measure by a mechanical process. Photographs have been traditionally valued as visual documents of real things that were in the camera's field (a value that has been lamentably undermined by digitalization). Their significance, therefore, tends to be specific to a time and place. For example, the power of Dorothea Lange's famous Depression-era photograph *Migrant Mother* is inextricably linked to the history of that period—and to the feelings that history has inspired. By contrast, a painting of the same subject would be more likely, as an abstraction from reality, to transcend its time and place, thereby implying the suffering caused by poverty in general.

Furthermore, while one assumes that everything about a painting is the result of choices made by the artist, one can never be sure, when looking at a photograph, which aspects were selected as

important or meaningful by the photographer and which were accidental or incidental. Chance always plays a part in photography, and it often plays a very great part, even in photographs that are highly valued. The historic photograph of the American flag-raising at Iwo Jima, for example, was shot under such chaotic conditions of battle that when the photographer snapped the picture, he was exercising virtually no control; he was even unable to compose the scene through the viewfinder, as he later recounted. Many fine photographs are largely lucky accidents of this kind, whereas no true work of art ever is. Every thoughtful viewer and teacher should be mindful of this distinction.

### **An Artist's Engagement with the Subject**

As I noted previously, a distinctive characteristic of art is that the maker feels a personal connection to the subject. What I mean by such personal engagement can be illustrated through a drawing by a child I know—my grandniece Sophie, who was, at the time of the drawing, then eight years old. In making it, she was attempting to create a visual recollection of a particularly memorable day that she had spent at the seashore.<sup>14</sup> Her fascination with birds and other wild creatures was evident in the care with which she rendered them—from a great blue heron with his gracefully curving neck and characteristic tuft of feathers on his crown to a group of little sandpipers scurrying along the water's edge and a seal poking his head through the waves that were being whipped up by the wind. In drawing each of these elements from memory, Sophie had to think about them intently to recall and re-create their distinctive features and expressive characteristics. In so doing, she took possession of them and of the experience that she had had that day in a far deeper way than her simply snapping a photograph would have done. So, too, one can sense, when looking at her drawing, that it was important to her and that the care that went into its making reflects more than casual or perfunctory interest on her part.

This principle informs every work of art by mature artists as well. It is perhaps most evident in the art of the portrait. Portrait painting cannot rise to the level of art when the painter feels no affinity for or keen interest in the sitter. Velazquez's most compelling portraits, for example, are those of the court dwarves, jesters, and common people whom he painted on his own initiative—not the formal royal portraits required of him in his capacity as court painter (consider his *Don Diego de Acedo*, for example, as contrasted with one of his portraits of Philip IV). Nor is it any accident that Rembrandt's most moving portraits are of himself, his son, and the women whom he loved. Finally, the American painter Thomas Eakins rarely accepted portrait commissions, choosing to limit his subjects to individuals whom he knew intimately or greatly admired—such as his wife, Susan Macdowell Eakins, or his student and fellow painter, Henry Ossawa Tanner.<sup>15</sup>

### **Natural versus Symbolic Meaning**

I briefly alluded earlier to the principle that works of visual art convey meaning primarily through depictive and expressive means rather than through symbols. The eminent art historian Erwin Panofsky clearly articulated the distinction between these sources of meaning more than six decades ago in an essay that should be required reading for anyone seriously interested in the visual arts.<sup>16</sup>

As Panofsky noted, the primary source of meaning in a work of painting or sculpture is what he termed its *natural subject matter*—that is, forms that are intelligible simply by virtue of our shared human experience, without any specialized cultural knowledge. Natural subject matter, he further explained, can be both factual and expressive (his term was “expressional”). Factual subject matter consists of recognizable, although not necessarily realistic, representations of such things as human beings, animals, plants, and everyday objects. Expressive subject matter has more to do with the manner in which such things are represented—that is, with emotionally evocative qualities of

pose, gesture, facial expression, atmosphere, and so forth.

The secondary source of meaning in visual art is what Panofsky termed the *conventional subject matter* of a work. Understanding the meaning of conventional subject matter—including, most notably, symbols of all kinds—requires culture-specific knowledge, which is extrapictorial rather than intrinsic. I should note that Panofsky's concern in his essay involved interpreting images (in particular, the iconographically complex images of Renaissance art) rather than with evaluating them. Nevertheless, I think that he would have agreed with my point, which is that the emotional power of works of visual art depends far more heavily on their natural subject matter than it does on their symbolic content.

Teachers who emphasize the need to help students decode images place an undue emphasis on symbolic content. A painting often cited in this regard is Jan van Eyck's justly famed wedding portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his young bride, Jeanne Cenami. True, van Eyck included many details having symbolic as well as natural meaning (from the figure of a little dog, as a sign of fidelity, to the burning of a solitary candle, signifying the all-seeing Christ). These indicate the sacramental character of the image as bearing witness to the Catholic union of this couple.

Knowledge of these symbols can indeed enrich one's understanding of the painting. The emotional power of the work derives not from its symbolic content, however, but from its natural subject matter and its depictive and expressive qualities—such as the intensely sober facial expressions of the young couple, their gesture of joining hands, and the aura of tranquil solemnity in the elegant bedchamber. These are the qualities that make it a great work of art, an emotionally meaningful image that transcends the particular historic moment being represented and conveys something about the gravity and importance of marriage in general. Unlike the symbolic elements, these qualities require no decoding; they are immediately and naturally accessible to attentive viewers.

It is such qualities, in my view, that art teachers should be most concerned with encouraging their students to respond to in works of art.

Modernist and postmodernist work has so dominated thinking about art in recent years that many teachers have lost sight of the expressive qualities of true art—qualities that are absent both from abstract painting and sculpture, on one hand, and, on the other, from postmodernist genres such as pop art, installations, and photography-based work. A useful corrective, therefore, is to spend some time simply looking at a broad range of images that exhibit these qualities. A related goal of the National Standards for Arts Education is that students should gain “an informed acquaintance with exemplary works of art from a variety of cultures and historical periods.”<sup>17</sup> As indicated by the group of works that I have chosen as examples, the subjects and themes that have most inspired painters and sculptors across the ages have remained remarkably similar, however different they may be in their treatment.<sup>18</sup> They pertain to certain universals of our human condition—universals that transcend the currently politicized issues of race, gender, and social class that have increasingly but mistakenly become the focus of art education.

### Questions and Answers

Not surprisingly, the talk on which this article is based was challenged by questions and comments from school teachers, college professors, and museum art educators in the audience, most of whom have adopted at least some of the assumptions and methods of VCS. Their objections and my responses follow in a somewhat revised form of my original talk.

*The beauty of craft objects.* One teacher asked whether a craft object such as a beautifully shaped piece of pottery can be spiritually uplifting and convey human values through the expressive power of form in itself.

In my view, any object of human use that is made with great care and is lovingly shaped into a sensuously pleasing form can indeed be uplifting and can

imply certain values. For that reason, well-made craft objects are very important enhancements to human life. But abstract form alone is incapable of conveying the sort of depth of themes and values that can be embodied in works of representational art—ideas such as the love of a mother for a child, the horrors of war, or the gravity of marriage vows. That is why it is crucial to maintain a distinction between craft and art. The flouting of that distinction in recent years, by craftsmen aspiring to be artists and by the curators and dealers who promote their work, has resulted in a plethora of worthless objects serving no practical utility and conveying no meaning. Among the more notorious examples of this trend in the crafts is the work of the furniture artist Wendell Castle, which is said by some to have moved into the sphere of art by “becoming sculpture.” Castle’s arbitrary concoctions no longer function as furniture, yet they fail equally as sculpture, for they are utterly meaningless.<sup>19</sup>

*Decoding images.* Another teacher asked why I maintained that students cannot derive joy from decoding images. Arguing that a gay person or a person of color can derive joy from such an activity, he observed, “My lesbian and gay students, for example, enjoy uncovering the homophobic attitudes embodied in some work—it’s very important to them.”

I replied that, although one may indeed derive some satisfaction from such decoding, I would hesitate to characterize it as joy. My chief concern was that as long as students are focused on detecting alleged racist, sexist, or elitist assumptions, they are likely to miss the sorts of broader human values and concerns that have been central to the visual arts since prehistory (in addition, there is the danger of evoking false readings, of detecting biases where they do not, in fact, exist). In any case, no work should be expected to have the same effect on everyone, in my view. Each student should be encouraged to seek out and understand what it is that he or she responds to, whether positively or negatively, in a variety of works. Students should not be primed, however, to look

only for the purportedly problematic subtexts.

*An artist’s vision.* A third participant asked, “Is an artist’s expression personal, or communal and cultural?”

My answer was that it is both. Every artist, although an autonomous individual, lives and functions in a cultural context. That context—its assumptions, values, language, and manners—inevitably exerts an influence. The degree and result of that influence, however, varies widely from individual to individual. No one need simply be a creature of the Zeitgeist, doomed to reflect only the dominant assumptions of his culture. As an individual, an artist is always free to reject, question, or challenge what he sees around him. And some, though surely not all, of the world’s great art has been created by individuals who did just that. Goya—whose *Third of May* and *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* are included in my group of exemplary works—comes to mind here.

*Abstract art.* A fourth questioner asked, “Didn’t abstract artists such as Mondrian and Kandinsky attempt to convey important spiritual values through their work?”

It is certainly true that the pioneers of the abstract movement certainly intended to embody deep metaphysical meanings in their work, as Louis Torres and I have argued at length in *What Art Is* and elsewhere. They failed, however, because no one can even begin to discern such intentions from their paintings alone. Although their intentions were both serious and sincere, they were operating under profoundly mistaken views, not only of the nature of external reality but also of the interrelationship between perception, cognition, and emotion. In sum, the sort of meanings they intended simply could not be conveyed through abstract forms and color alone.

*The expressive power of abstract art.* One artist reported that her abstract paintings feel more like a direct form of expression for her than her figurative work and asked, “What is your view on this?”

In response, I asked, “Is what you were expressing accessible to anyone

else? You may indeed feel that you are expressing yourself more directly through an abstract painting, and you may derive personal satisfaction from the process. But if you show the work to others, however, can they sense what you felt you were expressing?" When teachers and curators present abstract work in the public context of a classroom or a museum, the assumption is that the work is of value to others, not merely to the person who made it.

appreciation of authentic works of art can be enhanced by informed discussion of its features, its cultural context, the life and goals of the artist, and so forth. What I am arguing against is explanations purporting to justify work that is utterly incomprehensible on its own terms. More and more these days, viewers enter a museum or gallery of contemporary art (a misused term invariably implying antitraditional postmodernist work) and say "What is

**W**e have it in our power to appreciate genuine works of art. Work that makes no sense without a purported explanation is failed art.

### Deeper Issues

One teacher drew the comparison between inaccessible art and the sciences, maintaining that students often say, "I don't get it" when they are first introduced to the quadratic formula in mathematics, and teachers go on to explain it to them. Why, he asked, should we treat their failure to understand abstract painting and sculpture any differently?

The answer is simple. Unlike mathematics, the arts should not require specialized technical knowledge to be understood. Because they have their origin in fundamental aspects of human nature that we all share, their comprehension should not depend on technical expertise. True, the creation of art requires a degree of technical mastery. We all have it in our power, however, to understand and appreciate genuine works of art simply by virtue of being human. Work that makes no sense at all without a purported explanation is, in my view, either bogus or failed art.

*Arts education.* A final questioner inquired whether I think it is possible to enhance the understanding and appreciation of art through education.

In my view, understanding and

the point of all of this? What am I doing here?" Often, without the wall texts, they cannot even be sure whether what they are looking at is meant to be part of the exhibition or is simply an everyday object, piece of equipment, or a bit of trash left behind.

### Notes

1. Perhaps the most telling evidence of the bankruptcy of cultural theory in literary studies is the revisionist view put forth in the latest book by Terry Eagleton, one of the foremost proponents of such a theoretical emphasis. Although he protests that it is "not as though the whole project was a ghastly mistake on which some merciful soul has now blown the whistle," he insists—against the tendencies of contemporary cultural theory—on a renewed concern with such values as truth, virtue, objectivity, and standards of morality (*After Theory* [New York: Basic Books, 2003], 1 et passim). Later, Eagleton said, "The postmodern prejudice against norms, unities and consensuses is a politically catastrophic one." Cultural theorists, he said, can no longer "afford simply to keep recounting the same narratives of class, race, and gender" (qtd. in Dinitia Smith, "Cultural Theorists, Start Your Epitaphs," *New York Times*, January 3, 2004).

2. "Where's the Art in Today's Art Education?" *What Art Is* online, November, 2002, <http://www.aristos.org/whatart/arted-1.htm>, reprinted in a slightly revised form in *Arts*

*Education Policy Review* 104 (4): 9–12.

3. To quote the prospectus of a recently established academic program in VCS at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, "Anything visible is a potential object of study for Visual Culture, and the worthiness of any visual object or practice as an object of study depends not on its inherent qualities, as in the work of art, but on its place within the context of the whole of culture." See "New Academic Paradigms," *University of Wisconsin–Madison Visual Culture Cluster*, <http://www.visualculture.wisc.edu/whatisvisualculture.htm>. In effect, then, works of art such as the *Nike of Samothrace* and Michelangelo's *David* are to be treated on a par with artifacts such as Mattel's Barbie and Ken dolls.

4. For an analysis of the nature of art (in the sense of the so-called fine arts), and why both abstract (nonobjective) painting and sculpture and the decorative arts should be excluded from this category, see Michelle Marder Kamhi and Louis Torres, *What Art Is: The Esthetic Theory of Ayn Rand* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000), especially chapter 8, "The Myth of 'Abstract Art.'" Although K–12 art education has traditionally concerned itself as much with the crafts and design as with painting and sculpture, teachers should be mindful of the important distinctions between these categories and their respective functions.

5. Terry Barrett, "Interpreting Visual Culture," *Art Education* 56 (2): 6.

6. In this respect, *Cut and Paste* falls entirely within the dubious postmodernist category of "conceptual art," defined in the *Oxford Dictionary of Art*, ed. Ian Chilvers and Harold Osborne (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), as "various forms of art in which the idea for a work is considered more important than the finished product, if any." Not surprisingly, Michael Ray Charles began as a student of advertising design and illustration, the features of which remain prominent in his work.

7. Barrett, "Interpreting Visual Culture," 8.

8. National Standards for Arts Education, "Summary Statement: Education Reform, Standards, and the Arts," <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ArtsStandards.html>.

9. Ibid.

10. See the discussion of Oliver Sacks's work in *What Art Is*, 123–27.

11. In any discussion of this kind, it is, of course, important to recognize that although the boundaries between categories of things in reality may not always be clear-cut, identifying prototypical characteristics for each category is nonetheless valid and useful. Despite any disagreement that might exist over whether a particular shade of aquamarine is more blue or more green, for example, we do not hesitate to teach children to recognize the colors blue and green.

12. Unlike virtually all of today's art historians and critics, I do not regard photography as an art form, although it shares certain features with painting. See "Photography: An Invented 'Art,'" *What Art Is*, 180–88; see also "Ansel Adams—a Great Modern 'Artist'?" *What Art Is* online, March 2002, <http://www.aristos.org/whatart/adams.htm>. See also "Yousuf Karsh—Portrait Photographer par Excellence," *What Art Is* online, November 2002, <http://www.aristos.org/whatart/karsh.htm>.

13. On postmodernism in the visual arts, see *What Art Is* online, <http://www.aristos.org/whatart/ch14.htm>, and *What Art Is*, 262–82.

14. For an image of Sophie's drawing, see "A Wild Day at Half Moon Bay," *What Art Is* online, <http://www.aristos.org/images/wildday.jpg>.

15. Louis Torres, "Thomas Eakins: Painting Pure Thought," *What Art Is* online, <http://aristos.org/aris-03/eakins.htm>.

16. Erwin Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art" (1939), reprinted in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), 26–54.

17. National Standards for Art Education (see note 7).

18. See "Images of Exemplary Works of Art," *What Art Is* online, <http://www.aristos.org/aris-04/artlist.htm>.

19. Castle's work is discussed in *What Art Is*, 211–12.

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**Michelle Marder Kamhi**, an independent scholar and critic, is coauthor of *What Art Is: The Esthetic Theory of Ayn Rand* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000), and the coeditor of *Aristos*, an online review of the arts at <http://www.aristos.org/>.

## THE SURDNA ARTS TEACHERS FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

The Surdna Foundation is holding the fifth round of a national initiative to support the revitalization of outstanding arts teachers in specialized public arts high schools. Surdna's goal is to help arts teachers in public arts high schools increase their effectiveness as they train young people for careers or advanced study in the visual, performing, and literary arts. Deadlines are rolling.

The Surdna Arts Teachers Fellowship Program will enable selected teachers to create art with professionals in their fields, stay current with new practices and resources, and create new bodies of work. Twenty prizes of up to \$5,000 each will be awarded and complementary grants of \$1,500 will be given to each winner's school for postfellowship activities.

*Information:* Kimberly Bartosik, Associate Program Officer for the Arts, Surdna Foundation, 330 Madison Avenue, Thirtieth Floor, New York, NY 10017; (212) 557-0010, ext. 254; [kbartosik@syrdba.org](mailto:kbartosik@syrdba.org).

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